

United States Marine Corps
Command and Staff College
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2076 South Street
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Quantico, Virginia 22134-5068

MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

TITLE: U.S. ENGAGEMENT IN CENTRAL ASIA

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTERS OF MILITARY STUDIES

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AY 2000-01

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Report Documentation Page		
Report Date 30 Mar 2001	Report Type N/A	Dates Covered (from... to) -
Title and Subtitle U.S. Engagement in Central Asia	Contract Number	
	Grant Number	
	Program Element Number	
Author(s)	Project Number	
	Task Number	
	Work Unit Number	
Performing Organization Name(s) and Address(es) United States Marine Corps Command and Staff College Marine Corps University 2076 South Street Marine Corps Combat Development Command Quantico, VA 22134-5068	Performing Organization Report Number	
Sponsoring/Monitoring Agency Name(s) and Address(es)	Sponsor/Monitor's Acronym(s)	
	Sponsor/Monitor's Report Number(s)	
Distribution/Availability Statement Approved for public release, distribution unlimited		
Supplementary Notes		
Abstract <p>Over the last ten years the U.S. Government has adopted a strategy of engagement in Central Asia. This strategy has been primarily executed through Regional Commander in Chiefs using various military means including International Military Education and Training, Counter-Drug and Counter-Terrorist Training, and other elements of military peacetime engagement. This strategy has not been successful in achieving U.S. goals of creating peaceful Democratic and open Nation States in Central Asia not dependent on Russia for security and economic assistance. This is largely due to the conflicting AIM of U.S. Engagement Strategy in Limiting Russia's role in the region. Additionally, many of the obstacles to military peacetime engagement are economic and political in nature and would be better addressed by a more Robust State Department effort. Success of U.S. efforts in the region, regardless of which government agency takes the lead, must have the underpinning of a clean National intent in Central Asia provided by the National Security Council.</p>		
Subject Terms		
Report Classification unclassified	Classification of this page unclassified	

Classification of Abstract unclassified	Limitation of Abstract UU
Number of Pages 61	

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

FORM APPROVED - - - OMB NO. 0704-0188

public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington headquarters services, directorate for information operations and reports, 1215 Jefferson davis highway, suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the office of management and budget, paperwork reduction project (0704-0188) Washington, dc 20503

1. AGENCY USE ONLY (LEAVE BLANK)		2. REPORT DATE 30 MARCH 2001	3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED STUDENT RESEARCH PAPER
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE U.S. ENGAGEMENT IN CENTRAL ASIA		5. FUNDING NUMBERS N/A	
6. AUTHOR(S) MAJOR ERIK B. KRAFT, U.S. MARINE CORPS			
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) USMC COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE 2076 SOUTH STREET, MCCDC, QUANTICO, VA 22134-5068		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER NONE	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) SAME AS #7.		10. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER: NONE	
11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES NONE			
12A. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT NO RESTRICTIONS		12B. DISTRIBUTION CODE N/A	
13. ABSTRACT (MAXIMUM 200 WORDS) OVER THE LAST TEN YEARS THE U.S. GOVERNMENT HAS ADOPTED A STRATEGY OF ENGAGEMENT IN CENTRAL ASIA. THIS STRATEGY HAS BEEN PRIMARILY EXECUTED THROUGH REGIONAL COMMANDER IN CHIEFS USING VARIOUS MILITARY MEANS INCLUDING INTERNATIONAL MILITARY EDUCATION AND TRAINING, COUNTER-DRUG AND COUNTER-TERRORIST TRAINING, AND OTHER ELEMENTS OF MILITARY PEACETIME ENGAGEMENT. THIS STRATEGY HAS NOT BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN ACHIEVING U.S. GOALS OF CREATING PEACEFUL DEMOCRATIC AND OPEN NATION STATES IN CENTRAL ASIA NOT DEPENDENT ON RUSSIA FOR SECURITY AND ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE. THIS IS LARGELY DUE TO THE CONFLICTING AIM OF U.S. ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY IN LIMITING RUSSIA'S ROLE IN THE REGION. ADDITIONALLY, MANY OF THE OBSTACLES TO MILITARY PEACETIME ENGAGEMENT ARE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL IN NATURE AND WOULD BE BETTER ADDRESSED BY A MORE ROBUST STATE DEPARTMENT EFFORT. SUCCESS OF U.S. EFFORTS IN THE REGION, REGARDLESS OF WHICH GOVERNMENT AGENCY TAKES THE LEAD, MUST HAVE THE UNDERPINNING OF A CLEAR NATIONAL INTENT IN CENTRAL ASIA PROVIDED BY THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL.			
14. SUBJECT TERMS (KEY WORDS ON WHICH TO PERFORM SEARCH) CENTRAL ASIA, ENGAGEMENT, ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY, MILITARY ENGAGEMENT		15. NUMBER OF PAGES: 56	
		16. PRICE CODE: N/A	

17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT	18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE:	19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT	20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT
<i>UNCLASSIFIED</i>	<i>UNCLASSIFIED</i>	<i>UNCLASSIFIED</i>	<i>NONE</i>

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Title: U.S. ENGAGEMENT IN CENTRAL ASIA

Author: Major Erik B. Kraft, U.S. Marine Corps

Thesis: U.S. Engagement Strategy in Central Asia should focus on political and economic means to shape Central Asia, under the coordination of the National Security Council (NSC), and executed by the State Department rather than depend primarily on peacetime military engagement to achieve national objectives.

Discussion: A complete review and analysis of the strategic setting of Central Asia reveals the depth of competition for influence there as well as a sufficiency of varied and complex challenges. Not only is there rivalry between external regional competitors, but there also exists a plentitude of suspicion and friction points between the five republics themselves. Problems in the region range the spectrum of social, political and security concerns. Two problems, however dominate the region and these consist of economic and ethnic issues. Against this is a backdrop of instability and uncertainty provided by the on-going conflicts in Tajikistan and Afghanistan.

The U.S. government has sought to promote its national interests (ensuring Western access to energy and preventing the spread of violence and transnational threats) primarily through the application of military engagement. This engagement strategy, in addition to achieving regional interests, is expected to support the broader U.S. policy of limiting the spread of Russian and Iranian influence. The support of this broader policy pits U.S. engagement efforts against its potentially most viable partner in the region. Rivalry with Russia restricts the effectiveness of U.S. engagement in Central Asia and frustrates collective security efforts. It also exacerbates the difficulties in overcoming the complexity of the security threats as well as economic hurdles. As a result, U.S engagement in Central Asia will continue to have only nominal results and carry the political risk of forming anti-U.S. blocs in the region.

Conclusions: The United States should make the following changes to U.S. engagement strategy for Central Asia. First, engagement should not be focused on limiting Russian influence in the region. Instead, the U.S. should seek some level of partnership with Moscow in an attempt to bring stability to Central Asia and resist potential encroachment by China and Iran. Second, the U.S. should limit the level of military engagement in Central Asia in order to reduce points of contention and tension with Russia. Any efforts towards collective security should include Russia and recognize its role as the primary guarantor of regional security. Third, a diminished emphasis on military engagement in Central Asia requires a corresponding increase in political and economic means. Properly directed and applied, these means stand a better chance in addressing two of the major catalysts of instability in the region: the conflicts in Tajikistan and Afghanistan and the developing economies.

The State Department must expand the role of the special coordinator of the Caspian Basin to include the entire region, giving him or her a greater administrative authority and a larger technical staff. This will allow a greater focus on coordinating the economic and political elements of engagement. Specifically, the State Department should coordinate commercial and energy initiatives in order to ensure that these support overall U.S. national objectives. At the interagency level, greater effort should be expended in coordinating the decision making process and keeping a consistent policy of engagement in Central Asia. Coordination of both the State Department and the Central Command by the NSC will ensure a more focused effort.

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MAP OF CENTRAL ASIA

MILITARY ENGAGEMENT IN CENTRAL ASIA

The emergence of the independent states of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, combined with the vast oil and natural gas resources of the Caspian Sea region, have increased the geopolitical importance of this area. As these newly independent countries continue their transition to becoming post-modern states, they are vulnerable to a variety of internal and intra-regional threats. Further collapse of the security environment in the region may result in the Central Asian republics becoming a hotbed of international terrorism, narcotics-trafficking, and Islamic extremism. The resulting instability in Central Asia may constrain and limit Western participation in the emerging markets of the region and could produce varied threats to United States (U.S.) security worldwide. Therefore, it is in the U.S. interest to consider the prevention of these threats in addition to access to energy resources when tailoring strategy towards Central Asia.

Consequently, since 1991, the United States has utilized a strategy of engagement in the region. The Central Asian engagement strategy applies all the elements of national power (economic, informational, military and political) to achieve the overall goal of creating stability by promoting and supporting democratic and economic reforms. However, U.S. strategy in Central Asia continues to be executed chiefly through the application of military engagement under the control of the geographic Commanders in Chiefs (CINCs). This has given engagement in the region primarily a military character at the expense of other U.S. political and economic means.

Over the last decade, U.S. military engagement sought to promote regional stability in the Central Asian states by building professional militaries within the five republics, encouraging collective security arrangements independent of Russian support and control, and reducing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The National Command Authority under President Bill Clinton believed this would result in the formation of viable democracies in the heart of Asia. Although several Central Asian countries initially experimented with forming democratic governments, all eventually reverted to more authoritarian and repressive regimes. Overall, the effectiveness of military engagement in promoting professional armed forces and building viable collective security organizations has been limited.¹

U.S. strategy in the region has failed to achieve strategic objectives due to a number of political and economic factors. Russia is still deeply entrenched in the region, democracy has suffered setbacks in all Central Asian states, most markets retain characteristics of centralized control, and the Afghanistan civil war continues to destabilize the entire region. Major challenges to engagement stemming from the Central Asian strategic environment include the following: Russian perceptions of their sphere of influence, a lack of economic resources in the region, global and regional competition (particularly from Russia, Iran, China and Turkey), ethnic strife and tension, and the policies of the individual Central Asian governments. Moreover, the broader U.S. policy of limiting Russian and Iranian influence in the Central Asia restricts regional engagement options.

Although military engagement has helped achieve some stability and has promoted U. S. interests in the region, it will not produce the cornucopia of social change that the previous U.S. administration intended. The United States must avoid expanding its policy of military

¹ The United States did achieve success in removing nuclear weapons from Kazakhstan through a combination of military and economic incentives. Continued engagement as well as Kazakhstan's desire to integrate with the global

engagement in Central Asia due to the unacceptable political and military risks posed by Russia and the other regional competitors. The national strategy should instead focus on political and economic means to shape Central Asia, under the coordination of the National Security Council (NSC), and executed by the State Department. Military engagement ought to continue as part of the overall strategy of engagement with modifications and restrictions.

This paper answers the question of why U.S. engagement in Central Asia has not been successful in fully attaining U.S. strategic objectives in the region. It addresses this question by exploring the Central Asian strategic environment in relation to military engagement over the last nine years. The first section establishes the strategic setting in Central Asia and defines the interests of local and regional powers. This is followed by an overview and analysis of the major challenges to military engagement and then by a discussion of proposed changes to United States military strategy in Central Asia, within the context of U.S. grand strategy for the region. The final section will present a summary and offer a course of action for future engagement efforts in the Central Asian Republics.

STRATEGIC SETTING IN CENTRAL ASIA

The potential exploitation of the Caspian Basin energy resources, the menaces of transnational threats such as terrorism, narcotics trafficking, and WMD proliferation, and the distribution of ethnic groups across international borders all make Central Asia a region of geopolitical importance. Intense competition among the regional powers and their intertwined concerns increase the volatility and risks of involvement. The complexity of the strategic setting is further affected by the interests, dependencies and friction points of the Central Asian states

community continues to give the United States some leverage over the proliferation of WMDs in the region.

themselves. To clearly define the strategic setting in Central Asia, the interests and relationships of the Central Asian republics, the neighboring nations, and the U.S. must be examined in turn. First, however, it is important to provide a brief historical background, as well as a discussion concerning the energy resources and transnational threats emanating from the area.

Recent History

Geographically, Central Asia is a region divided among the five republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The area is four million square kilometers (roughly the size of the continental United States) and is inhabited by over 50 million people. The region has poor water resources and is bounded by mountains in the east and south and the Caspian Sea to the west.² Much of the area contains only marginal agricultural land, and the region has experienced significant environmental damage due to Soviet centralized agricultural programs.

The majority of the population shares a common linguistic and cultural heritage (the Turkmen, Uzbeks, Kazakhs, and Kyrgyz speak Turkic languages). However, the other major ethnic group, the Tajiks, have a Persian heritage.³ The difference between the Turkic and Persian populations include major religious differences. The Turkic speaking population largely practices the Sunni variant of Islam, whereas the Tajiks are practitioners of the Shiite faith. These cultural and religious differences create intra-state and inter-state rifts exacerbated by parochialism and the isolation of many villages. There are also large numbers of ethnic Russians spread throughout the region and some Uighur populations, which are ethnically linked to

² Martha Brill Olcott, "Ceremony and Substance: The Illusion of Unity in Central Asia," in *Central Asia and the World*, ed M. Mandelbaum (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1994), 20.

³ Martha Brill Olcott, *Central Asia's New States: Independence, Foreign Policy, and Regional Security* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996), 25.

populations in northeast China. Over the ages, this diverse ethnic mix has created a “complex pattern of interrelated peoples” that have maintained historic claims to their ancestral lands, regardless of international boundaries.⁴

The entire region is bound demographically and economically. All five states are considered part of the Third World, having high birth rates, a disproportionately young population and low life expectancy.⁵ Low productivity rates, a high proportion of the population engaged in agriculture, and low per capita incomes also characterize the five states of Central Asia.

Finally, Central Asia is bound as a region by history and the negative impact of Soviet control. The area is no stranger to international competition for control. Competition over influence and control of Central Asia between Britain, the Ottoman Empire and Tsarist Russia was prevalent during the early 19th Century. The Russian empire was expanding into Central Asia at almost 200,000 square kilometers per year by the mid 19th century. Britain sought to limit this growth in order to prevent Russian encroachment into colonial India.⁶ Once known as the “Great Game,” this early competition underscores the historic geopolitical importance of the region. With the exception of Adolph Hitler’s historic drive toward the Caspian Sea region during World War II, outside intervention in Central Asia was curtailed throughout the eighty years of Communist rule after the takeover of the region by the Soviet Union.

The speed by which independence was thrust upon the five Central Asian states exacerbated the flaws left by the legacy of Communist rule. With no alternative political structures in place after independence, the Central Asian states rely on the existing communist

⁴ Olcott in *Central Asia and the World*, 21.

⁵ Michael Mandelbaum, *Central Asia and the World*, ed. M. Mandelbaum (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1994), 2.

political structure to maintain order. The economies of the region are still negatively affected by the legacy of Soviet centralized control. Structured primarily as providers of raw materials, the Central Asian states have yet to create a diversified economic base. Similarly, the militaries of the fledgling states are not well equipped to handle internal security and maintain the integrity of the borders without Russian assistance. The Central Asian populations had largely been precluded from the upper echelons of the Soviet Armed Forces Officer Corps and many of the Central Asian enlisted ranks were relegated to non-combat units. Unprepared for independence, “the leaders of the newly independent states quickly discovered that nation-building in Central Asia is frustrated by unique cultural, linguistic, religious, and poetic history of this region.”⁷ The combination of these problems and others have contributed to Central Asia becoming a neglected and decayed portion of the former Soviet empire.

Energy Resources

Although proven Caspian oil and natural gas reserves will not position Central Asia to supplant the Persian Gulf as the primary supplier of energy to the United States and the West, the importance of the energy resources in Central Asia continue to rise as global demand for oil and natural gas increases. According to former U.S. Energy Secretary Federico Pena, the Caspian Sea’s proven reserves “have been estimated to be as high as 15 to 29 billion barrels of oil while unproven reserves could bring that amount to 200 billion barrels.”⁸ If estimates about unproven reserves are correct, Caspian region energy resources represent the second largest potential source of oil and natural gas in the world, after the Middle East. However, even if the region

⁶ Jed C. Snyder, *After Empire: The Emerging Geopolitics of Central Asia* (Washington, DC: National Defense University, 1995), xvii.

⁷ Snyder, xvi.

reached its maximum oil production potential by the year 2010, exports would account for slightly less than 3 percent of global oil production.⁹ Total production is currently 1 million barrels per day, which could reach 3.4 million barrel per day by the year 2010. Regardless of the exact amount of reserves, unless a better means of transporting oil and natural gas to global markets is constructed, the potential energy resources of the region will continue to lie dormant.¹⁰

Even though projected Caspian oil and natural gas production represents only three percent of the global oil supply, the strategic importance of Caspian energy cannot be overlooked. The Caspian region may become an important alternative source of oil, especially for countries such as China, Japan and Korea who are seeking to reduce their dependence on, and increasing their leverage with, the Middle East and Russia. Besides acting to diversify supply, oil from the region will help offset the burgeoning global demand in the next decade. Secretary Pena, citing International Energy Agency figures, stated that the “importance of the region, which includes the central Asian former Soviet republics, can only grow as world energy demand doubles over the next 25 years.”¹¹

The difficulty in realizing the energy potential of Caspian oil lies primarily in the transportation of energy resources to global markets. The task requires both political stability in the area and a tremendous financial input.¹² Further complicating this issue is intense competition by states and groups vying for influence over resources and transportation routes.¹³

⁸ Pierre Glachant, “Caspian Sea Oil and Gas Reserves Crucial to National Security: U.S.,” 19 Nov 1997, Agence France Presse, URL:< http://web.nps.navy.mil/~relooney/Caspian_14.htm>, accessed 04 January 2001.

⁹ Plamen Tonchev, “Rising Asian Oil Demand and Caspian Reserves,” *The Economic Debate*, URL:< <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/usazerb/336.htm>>, accessed 04 January 2001.

¹⁰ Khalil El-saghir, “Caspian Sea Region: The Checkerboard of Oil and Minefields,” *University of Michigan – Dearborn*, URL:< <http://members.tripod.com/~KELSAGHIR/Caspian/index>>, accessed 04 January 2001.

¹¹ Glanchant, “Caspian Sea Oil and Gas Reserves Crucial to National Security: U.S.”

¹² Tonchev, “Rising Asian Oil Demand and Caspian Reserves.”

¹³ Ibid.

Russia wants to ensure that Caspian oil is transported to world markets via its territories. “The U.S. on the other hand seeks as many different pipeline routes as possible to prevent any one country from developing a stranglehold over the flow of oil from the region.”¹⁴ Other pipeline proposals include a 2,000 kilometer long pipeline from Kazakhstan to China and a Turkmenistan-Iran-Turkey pipeline. The vulnerable miles of pipeline can only be protected by stability and security in the states through which it transits. Any pipeline constructed in the region will be a potential target for terrorists, competing states, and transnational groups.

Transnational Threats

The increase in terrorism, the spread of Islamic extremism, the criminalization of the state infrastructure and economy, the rapid growth in cross border narcotics trafficking, and the possible proliferation of weapons of mass destruction represent an interrelated web of transnational challenges to the Central Asian states.¹⁵ Continued strife in Afghanistan is a major source of these threats. One major problem that contributes to the proliferation of transnational threats from Afghanistan and elsewhere is the inability of the Central Asian republics to secure their long and porous borders. Ultimately, if left unchecked, the transnational threats radiating from the region will increasingly affect neighboring states, and potentially, Western security.

The greatest transnational threat to regional stability is the possibility of widespread ethnic conflict resulting in violence and the disintegration of the states’ authority. Although not dormant, ethnic conflict and unrest are currently being suppressed by government forces in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Catalysts for ethnic violence are present in the form of the Afghanistan civil war and the on-going conflict in Tajikistan. The mass movement of

¹⁴ El-Saghir, “Caspian Sea Region: The Checkerboard of Oil & Minefield.”

refugees resulting from a change in the balance of power in either of these conflicts could erupt into violence between Tajiks and Uzbeks. This would inevitably boil over into the bordering states, all of which contain co-ethnic populations. Similarly, the continued repression of minorities by the authoritarian government in Uzbekistan adds momentum to the Islamic extremist movements that organize the disenfranchised and the poor. The prognosis for the region is an increase in all forms of transnational threats unless further economic, political and military reforms are initiated.

Interests, Dependencies and Friction Points of the Central Asian Republics

There is a tendency to assume that conditions are identical from state to state throughout the region. When considering the appropriate strategy in dealing with these fledgling nations it is important not to lump the states together.¹⁶ Although many of the Republics share similar friction points, there are significant differences concerning the interests and dependencies of the Central Asian states. The differences in each states' interests and dependencies is largely driven by geographical location, economic potential, and ethnic diversity. The difference in interests and dependencies also determines how each of the Central Asian republic deals with regional problems. Therefore, it is essential to examine the unique strategic setting of each Central Asian state separately.

Kazakhstan. The major security concerns of the Republic of Kazakhstan may be summarized as follows. First, the state faces a complex demography with over 38.4 percent of its population composed of Russians with the remaining population spread between Kazakhs and

¹⁵ Richard Sokolsky and Tanya Charlick-Paley, *NATO and Caspian Security: A Mission too Far?*, MR-1074-AF (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1999), 51.

other ethnic populations to include Volga Germans and Uighurs. Secondly, because Kazakhstan is so intertwined economically and militarily with Russia, it fears being controlled by Moscow. Balancing his seemingly pro-Russian parochialism, President Nursultan Nazarbayev has attempted to initiate policies that continue to integrate Kazakhstan into the global economic and political arenas. Although Kazakhstan is willing to take aid and enter into multilateral agreements with the West and the other Central Asian nations, President Nazarbayev realizes that the ultimate security of his state depends on maintaining positive relations with Russia.

Kazakhstan is the most ethnically diverse of the Central Asian states and has the largest population of ethnic Russians living within its borders. Kazakhstan's leadership is wary of ethnic conflict with its Slavic population and is concerned about the possibility that the Slavic population in Northern Kazakhstan will seek union with Russia and attempt to annex Kazakh territory. This concern partially stems from the region's prior history of ethnic violence. In 1986, a demonstration of Kazakh youths in Almaty protesting the replacement of a Kazakh communist party official by a Soviet official resulted in violence, and over 150 protestors were killed.¹⁷ President Nazarbayev, who views "maintaining racial harmony as the greatest challenge Kazakhstan faces," has taken several steps to ensure the integration of the Russian population. Upon independence, the Kazakhstan leadership outlawed all nationalist political parties (both Kazakh and Russian). Additionally, Kazakhstan has rejected the concept of a federation and has firmly established itself as a unitary state. Finally, President Nazarbayev is moving his capital to Akmola to consolidate Kazakh control over the northern part of the country.¹⁸ While these and other steps have been taken to discourage any separatist movement and to maintain

¹⁶Shafiquil Islam, "Capitalism on the Silk Route?," *Current History*, April 1994, 155.

¹⁷ Martha Brill Olcott and others, *Getting it Wrong: Regional Cooperation and the Commonwealth of Independent States* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999), 114.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 114.

racial harmony, Kazakhstan has stopped short of granting its Russian population dual citizenship, a demand initially made by Russia. Many Russians are leaving Kazakhstan and those that remain “seem resigned to live in a place where they feel like second class citizens.”¹⁹ The ethnic problem in Kazakhstan has not been solved, but to date the government has managed the situation sufficiently to avoid major upheaval and violence.

Kazakhstan’s economic dependence on Russia places it in a vulnerable position and makes Russia a major security threat. Kazakhstan remains primarily an exporter of raw materials and it depends on Russia for industrial goods and markets for its mineral resources. Despite its substantial oil reserves Kazakhstan is net importer of energy resources due to an oil transportation system configured to transport its crude oil to Russian refineries and not its own. Additionally, Kazakhstan maintains a substantial trade deficit and debt with its northern neighbor. Consequently, Russia enjoys considerable leverage over Kazakhstan and therefore an undue influence over its foreign policy.

Moreover, Kazakhstan is dependent on friendly Russian relations for its security. The border between Kazakhstan and Russia is 2400 kilometers and represents one of the longest contiguous land borders in the world. Current Kazakhstan armed forces are estimated at 40,000, barely sufficient to maintain internal order let alone guard against an external aggressor such as Russia, China, or Uzbekistan.

President Nazarbayev has sought to take advantage of his country’s ties to Russia as he simultaneously develops ties and integrates with the West and the rest of the world. Kazakhstan was the staunchest supporter of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Russia’s attempt to maintain an economic and collective security structure with the former Soviet states. Once the CIS failed, President Nazarbayev signed several bilateral security treaties with Russia,

¹⁹ Ibid, 120.

including establishing arrangements for the free travel of Russian troops across Kazakh territory, joint patrols, and the stationing of non-operational Russian soldiers in country. Simultaneously, Kazakhstan has pushed for Central Asian cooperation and has been involved in every multi-national effort undertaken in the region. Finally, Kazakhstan has exerted a significant level of independence by signing the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and entering into NPT-related security arrangements with the West, contrary to Russian desires. Although Kazakhstan has been entering into political and security arrangements with regional and global partners, President Nazarbayev realizes that maintaining positive relations with Russia takes priority.²⁰

Kygrystan. President Asker Akaev has two primary security concerns. Domestically, Kygrystan, like Kazakhstan, faces the threat of widespread ethnic unrest. Externally, the country is failing to protect its borders from the “boil over” of conflict in Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Uzbekistan. Both threats are exacerbated by Kyrgystan’s poor economy and limited and degraded military structure. Subsequently, in the absence of economic and military power, President Akaev has turned to diplomacy to address his country’s problems.

The Kyrgyz leadership realizes that the Uzbek minority, which represents 28 percent of the country’s total population, is the largest single threat to national security.²¹ There is a history of prior ethnic conflict between the Uzbeks living in southern Kygrystan and government forces. Tensions culminated in 1990 in the city of Osh, and the resulting violence left 230 people dead.²² Should open conflict erupt between the current government of Kyrgystan and the Uzbek minority, Uzbekistan will likely lend assistance to their ethnic brethren. Unable to match the military might of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan could lose territory to Uzbekistan including the hotly

²⁰ Olcott and others, *Getting it Wrong*, 114.

²¹ Ibid, 121.

contested Ferghana Valley. President Akaev has therefore sought to accommodate the Uzbeks within Kyrgyzstan through legislative action and land reform measures.

Kyrgyzstan's inability to guard its territorial borders, coupled with its widespread poverty and ethnic friction make it a prime location from which terrorist and militant groups can operate and seek refuge; many of these groups have roots in Afghanistan.²³ Kyrgyzstan's impotence to prevent transnational militant groups from using its territory as a base of operation has increased tensions between the Kyrgyz government and its neighbors. The more notable conflicts rising out of this dilemma is the insistence of the Uzbekistan government that Kyrgyzstan actively seek to eliminate anti-Uzbekistan militant groups operating from Kyrgyz territory. Uzbekistani government frustration has led to violations of Kyrgyzstan territory by Uzbek military forces. For example, in 1999, Uzbekistani aircraft crossed into Kyrgyz airspace and bombed a suspected 'Wahhabi' terrorist group's location killing several civilians.²⁴ Violence directed at foreigners by terrorist groups from Tajikistan operating in the Kyrgyz mountains has also threatened to forestall President Akaev's efforts to attract foreign capital and investment. One of the more infamous terrorist acts was the recent kidnapping of Japanese businessmen over several months in the Sokh valley of Kyrgyzstan.²⁵ The continued inability of Kyrgyzstan to ensure its own internal security continues to cause friction with its neighbors and threatens to derail economic efforts.

Kyrgyzstan has sought to address its internal and external security problems by maintaining good relations with its minority populations and its neighbors, while at the same

²² Ibid, 121.

²³ Stephen Kinzer, "Zealots' Latest Targets Are Poor, Remote and Vulnerable," New York Times, 31 October 1999, Column Name: The World: From the Caucasus to China, 3.

²⁴ The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *Strategic Survey 1999/2000* (London: Oxford University Press, 2000), XII Strategic Geography. Cited hereafter as IISS 2000.

²⁵ IISS 2000, XII.

time trying to attract investment and sympathy from the “outside world.” President Akaev has been eager to maintain ethnic tolerance with his country’s minority populations and has taken action to placate these groups, through land reform initiatives aimed at reducing tensions within the Uzbek population and by establishing Russian as the official state language to dissuade the ethnic Russians from emigrating .²⁶ These efforts have been successful in forestalling violence and stemming the exodus of ethnic minorities.²⁷

Kyrgyzstan has also achieved some measure of success in developing positive relations with its Central Asian neighbors and China. President Akaev has been a constant advocate of closer economic and military integration among the Central Asian states. Accordingly, Kyrgyzstan has entered into several economic and security agreements with Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, specifically the 1994 Tashkent Treaty and the 1995 Custom Union.²⁸ He has also supported the Central Asian Security Battalion, which is an on-going attempt by the U.S. government to promote collective security among the Central Asian governments as an alternative to the use of Russian peacekeeping forces. Similarly, Kyrgyzstan has sought to improve trade relations with China and worked to accommodate Chinese wishes (including the reduction of cross-border Uighur (a large ethnic minority in Kyrgyzstan) separatist support to compatriots in the Xinjiang province of China).²⁹

However, relations with its major ally, Russia, have eroded as Kyrgyzstan continues to focus on integration into the global economy. Russia retaliated for Kyrgyzstan being admitted

²⁶ Askar Akaev, “Foreword,” in *Central Asia: Conflict, Resolution, and Change*, eds. Ronald Z. Sagdeev and Susan Eisenhower (Chevy Chase, Md.: CPSS Press, 1995), xi.

²⁷ Olcott and others, *Getting it Wrong*, 123.

²⁸ The Custom Union is made up of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan. By joining the Union, Kyrgyzstan further signaled its intent to remain aligned with the policies of Russia and Kazakhstan. Even though Uzbekistan maintains one of the most regulated economies of the countries of the former Soviet Union and is not a member of the Customs Union, Kyrgyzstan has attempted to sustain a complicated economic relationship with Uzbekistan in the interests of positive relations. See Olcott and others, *Getting it Wrong*, 125.

²⁹ Olcott and others, *Getting it Wrong*, 120.

into the World Trade Organization (WTO) by imposing tariffs that have caused Kyrgyzstan to suffer economically.³⁰ The economic crises of 1998 forced Kyrgyzstan to look even more towards the West for aid. Furthermore, Kyrgyzstan's military dependence on Russia has dropped drastically since Kyrgyzstan asked Russian troops to leave and assumed responsibility of guarding its own borders. Russia now maintains only a few officers in Kyrgyzstan's border guard.³¹ President Akaev will continue his Western orientation because he sees Western capital as the only remedy for many of his country's problems. Although Kyrgyzstan will attempt to maintain strong economic relationships with Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Russia, it is doubtful that it will be able to do so and continue the pace of its own economic reforms in accordance with World Trade Organization direction.³² Kyrgyzstan's foreign relations emphasis will remain focused on securing funds and aid from the international community while attempting to maintain positive relations throughout the region.

Tajikistan. Tajikistan is a failed state currently held in check by the combined efforts of Uzbekistan and Russia. Domestic threats range from the criminalization of society, a shattered economy, and continued political violence. The greatest potential domestic threat to the state would be open conflict between the large Uzbek minority and the Tajik majority. This would certainly lead to invasion from Uzbekistan and its possible annexation of northern Tajikistan. The second most dangerous security threat would be the resumption of fighting between the Khujandis elite and the opposition forces that currently share power. Internationally, Tajikistan's greatest threat stems from the ongoing civil war in Afghanistan. Drugs, terrorists, the

³⁰ Ibid, 126.

³¹ Charles Fairbanks and others, "Strategic Assessment of Central Eurasia," *Central Asia – Caucasus Institute, SAIS* (Washington, DC: The Atlantic Council of the United States, January 2001), 82.

³² Olcott and others, *Getting it Wrong*, 126.

proliferation of small arms, and smuggling across the porous Afghan border continue to negatively impact the stability of Tajikistan. Furthermore, the defeat of the Northern Alliance (made up of forces under Generals Abdul Rashid Dostum, Ahmed Shah Masoud and Karim Khalilli) by the Taliban in Afghanistan would result in millions of Uzbek and Tajik refugees crossing into Tajikistan and Uzbekistan — a destabilizing event for all of Central Asia.³³

Currently, the Khujandis-dominated government in Dushanbe is controlled by Russia. “The inability of the republican leadership to cope with the political situation, exercise control over the whole territory, and provide the civil tranquility necessary for stable and economic development combined to make Tajikistan politically and economically dependent on Russia.”³⁴ In addition to its political influence in Tajikistan, Russia maintains over 8,200 military and border guards in the state as a buffer against Afghanistan.³⁵ This continuing dependence on Russia has led to the gradual erosion of the state’s sovereignty and independence. Therefore, until a significant change to Tajikistan’s current situation takes place (such as the resolution of the Afghanistan civil war), Tajikistan will remain a costly Russian “puppet state”.

Turkmenistan Of all the Central Asian states, Turkmenistan faces the least amount of internal unrest and external security threats. Although, internally, Turkmenistan has been vexed by chronic interclan rivalries within the political elite, President Saparmurad Niyazov shows “little tolerance of any form of political opposition.”³⁶ External threats stem from Turkmenistan’s proximity to Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Iran. These threats,

³³ The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *Strategic Survey 1996/1997*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1997), 252.

³⁴ Sergei Gretskey, “Civil War in Tajikistan: Causes, Developments, and Prospects for Peace,” in *Central Asia: Conflict, Resolution and Change*, eds. Ronald Z. Sagdeev and Susan Eisenhower (Chevy Chase, Md.: CPSS Press, 1995), 232.

³⁵ Fairbanks, 82.

³⁶ Olcott, *Central Asia’s New*, 145-146.

however, have not materialized because of Turkmenistan's policy of "positive neutrality" by which President Niyazov seeks to avoid entanglements in alliances and collective security arrangements.³⁷

Turkmenistan's policy of positive neutrality has resulted in the state becoming the regional spoiler of cooperative efforts in the region. Turkmenistan has refused to participate in the Central Asian trade union or the Tashkent Security agreement. Instead, it has established bilateral economic and security agreements directly with Russia. However, more recently President Niyazov has sought to distance his country from Russia and has focused more effort in building relations with Turkey and Iran.³⁸ To date, Turkmenistan has fostered close economic ties with Iran that include investments in fossil fuel transportation pipelines, other commercial interests, and an open border between their two nations.³⁹ Similarly, Turkmenistan is seeking to break with its Russian past and forge a less hostile relationship with Turkey. Finally, Turkmenistan has maintained positive relations with Afghanistan by refusing to support the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance in Afghanistan and the CIS peacekeeping force in Tajikistan, as well as fostering close personal relationships with leadership within the Taliban.⁴⁰

President Niyazov's attempt to guarantee his country's security by developing its economy by any means while maintaining its neutrality could ultimately disturb the equilibrium of the relations in Central Asia. Turkmenistan's focus on building ties with Iran, Turkey, and Afghanistan, instead of the other Central Asian states, detracts from the possibility of regional cooperation. Under the absolute authoritarianism of the current regime, U.S. engagement is

³⁷ Sokolsky, *NATO and Caspian Security*, 56.

³⁸ Roy Allison, "The Military and Political Security Landscape in Russia and the South," in *Eurasia in the 21st Century: The Total Security Environment*, Vol 2: *Russia, The Caucasus, and Central Asia: The 21st Century Security Environment*, eds. Rajan Menon and Yuri Fedorov and Ghia Nodia (New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1999), 34.

³⁹ Olcott, *Central Asia's New*, 150.

unlikely to produce a change in Turkmenistan's government or realign Turkmenistan's Iranian economic orientation. Also, it is doubtful that Turkmenistan will actively support U.S. initiatives toward Central Asian collective security arrangements.

Uzbekistan. In contrast to Turkmenistan's position as a potential spoiler of Central Asian unity, Uzbekistan is viewed by the U.S. as a potential stabilizer within the region.⁴¹ Uzbekistan enjoys greater geographic and economic independence from Russia (in contrast to Kazakhstan) and has a larger military and economic base (in comparison to smaller states like Kyrgyzstan). However, before Uzbekistan can become a regional unifier (or hegemony depending on one's perspective), President Islam Karimov must contain both his major domestic and external security threats. Domestically, Uzbekistan faces sporadic unrest, both political and ethnic, which often translate into violence and government opposition. Uzbekistan's immediate external and most serious security problems to the south and southeast come from the Afghanistan civil war and continuing unrest in Tajikistan, which bring with it terrorism, smuggling, narcotics trafficking, and the potential risk of ethnic conflict spillover to Uzbekistan.⁴²

The government faces three major competitors for the control of Uzbekistan: rival political parties (such as the Birlik (Unity) party and family based patronage networks), dissatisfied ethnic minorities (such as the ethnic Tajik minority) and politicized Islam. To combat all political challenges, President Karimov has created a "political climate that leaves no

⁴⁰ Ronald Grigor Suny, "Southern Tears: Dangerous Opportunities in the Caucasus," in *Eurasia in the 21st Century: The Total Security Environment*, Vol 2: *Russia, The Caucasus, and Central Asia: The 21st Century Security Environment*, eds. Rajan Menon and Yuri Fedorov and Ghia Nodia (New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1999), 151.

⁴¹ Kadir Alimov, "Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy: In Search of Strategy," in *Central Asia: Conflict, Resolution, and Change*, eds. Ronald Z. Sagdeev and Susan Eisenhower (Chevy Chase, Md.: CPSS Press, 1995), 186.

⁴² Allison in *Russia, The Caucasus, and Central Asia*, 33.

doubt about who was in charge of the nation.”⁴³ Violence, the suspension of basic human rights, restrictions of the freedom of press, and the outlawing of any opposition party has secured President Karimov’s position for the moment. However, these methods of maintaining domestic security have had a negative impact on Uzbekistan’s relations with the West. Until recently, the U.S. has shunned Uzbekistan in favor of the more liberal regimes in place in Kazakhstan and Kyrgystan.

Uzbekistan’s proximity to the civil war in Tajikistan and the current war in Afghanistan creates serious security problems. The potential of interethnic fighting between Tajiks and Uzbeks spreading into Uzbekistan from the contested regions is the primary concern of President Karimov. Moreover, the potential displacement of millions of Uzbeks living in Tajikistan and northern Afghanistan, should violence escalate in either region, would radically destabilize Uzbekistan.⁴⁴ Uzbekistan has in the past conducted military interventions alongside Russian troops in both Tajikistan and Northern Afghanistan and will not hesitate to resort to military force outside its borders to preclude attacks against Uzbek populations in both countries.

Uzbekistan’s foreign policy will seek to improve relations with the West while distancing itself from further Russian control. Its regional aspirations to become the leader of Central Asia will continue to grow; hence, President Karimov will remain a strong advocate of Central Asian regional cooperation on economic and security matters. Additionally, Uzbekistan will seek to change its negative image by relaxing some of the more visible aspects of authoritarianism and will move toward more privatization of the economy in an attempt to attract international aid and investment.

⁴³ Olcott, *Central Asia’s New*, 116.

⁴⁴ Olcott, *Central Asia’s New*, 113.

Interests of Neighboring States

A review of the primary security concerns and central foreign policy for each Central Asian Republic revealed characteristics and circumstances specific to each country. Within the context of U.S. engagement efforts in the region, such an analysis is helpful in estimating the potential success of military engagement programs in each Central Asian state and in the promotion of collective security throughout the region. Kazakhstan has the size and economic potential to play a leadership role in the collective security of the region. However, due to common geography, intertwined economics, and mutual security concerns, President Nazarbayev will most likely continue his country's Russian-oriented foreign policy. Kyrgystan, although the most radical Central Asian state in terms of economic and political reforms, is too small to play much more than a diplomatic role in the area. Tajikistan is consumed with its domestic problems and is essentially controlled from Moscow. Turkmenistan will continue to disdain entanglement in collective security in Central Asia and will instead turn its foreign policy toward Iran (and to a lesser extent Turkey) while maintaining bilateral relations with Russia. Uzbekistan has the military, population and economic potential to play a prominent role in stabilizing the region; however, its continuing authoritarian government and meager efforts towards economic and political reforms will continue to hinder relations with the West.

In addition to considering the unique situation of the Central Asian states, implementing and applying a military engagement strategy in the region requires examining the competing interests of the major states surrounding the area. These states include Afghanistan, China, Iran,

Russia and Turkey. This section will summarize each of these country's major interests in Central Asia, their foreign policy efforts and will make projections about future relations between each neighboring country, the U.S., and Central Asia.

Afghanistan Ninety percent of Afghanistan is controlled by the Taliban, an extremist Islamic group which constitutes the de facto government. Ending external support of the Northern Alliance of Mujahidin is the Taliban's principle national interest in Central Asia. This objective will be difficult for the Taliban to achieve due to strong ethnic ties between the 1.2 million Tajiks and 3 million Uzbeks in Northern Afghanistan, and because of the containment policy of Uzbekistan, Russia, and Iran, which is aimed at limiting the expansion of a greater Afghanistan state.⁴⁵ Aid to the Northern Alliance (through direct intervention if needed) will continue for the foreseeable future as a counter-balance to the Taliban. Of secondary importance to Afghanistan is the continued exportation of Islamic extremism throughout the region. For the Taliban, the exportation of ideology is as much an end as it is a method by which they seek to spread their influence throughout the region. Additionally, the Taliban have promoted the idea of building an overland pipeline from Central Asia across Afghanistan and into Pakistan. This effort, however, has been stymied and opposed by Russia, the U.S. and Iran.⁴⁶ Both of

⁴⁵ Andrei V. Zagorski, "Traditional Russian Security Interests in the Caucasus and Central Asia," in ,," in *Eurasia in the 21st Century: The Total Security Environment*, Vol 2: *Russia, The Caucasus, and Central Asia: The 21st Century Security Environment*, eds. Rajan Menon and Yuri Fedorov and Ghia Nodia (New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1999), 73-74. Zagorski discusses the Russian perception of Northern Afghanistan as a strategic buffer state against the spread of the Afghani brand of Islamic extremism into Central Asia. Uzbekistan and Iran have similar concerns. All foreign parties opposing the Taliban seek to prolong the current civil war as a means to keep the Taliban occupied.

⁴⁶ Sokolsky, *NATO and Caspian*, 14.

Afghanistan's primary interests are destabilizing to the region and are seen as the central security threat to Central Asia.⁴⁷

Afghanistan lacks economic and diplomatic means to project influence. Militarily, although the Taliban maintain upwards of 300,000 men under arms, they lack the logistical ability to carry out large-scale offensive operations outside their borders. To compensate for these weaknesses, Afghanistan has used indirect and alternative military means such as terrorism and has relied on the informational element of national power (Islamic extremism) to influence Central Asian countries. This foreign policy has spread terrorism (for example the Tashkent bombings in Feb 1999); formed Afghanistan sponsored Islamic extremist groups in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan; and spread narco-trafficking throughout the region. The future implications of the Afghanistan civil war and the Taliban's violent foreign policy in Central Asia are grim. Although the Taliban have made gains in their fight against the Northern Alliance, the conflict appears to have no end.⁴⁸

China. China's immediate national interests in Central Asia are twofold. First, China desires to prevent outside influence from further destabilize the Uighur population in its Xingjiang Autonomous Region, including the spread of Islamic extremism, terrorism and the narcotics trade. Secondly, China seeks to establish Central Asia as a strategic source of oil and natural gas to bypass the Western-dominated sea lines of communications (SLOCs) and Middle East petroleum sources. The Chinese made significant inroads towards this end when they

⁴⁷ Oumirserik Kasenov, "Central Asia: National, Regional and Global Aspects of Security," in *Security Dilemmas in Russia and Eurasia*, eds. Roy Allison and Christoph Bluth (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1998), 190.

⁴⁸ Shawn A. Howard, "The Afghan Connection," *National Security Studies Quarterly*, Summer 2000, 32. This article contains a great insight into the Taliban's exportation of Islamic extremism and its affect on Central Asia, especially Uzbekistan, Krygyzstan and Tajikistan. It also gives specific recommendation for U.S. short term, mid term and long-term policies in regard to Central Asia coping with the Afghanistan threat.

secured the rights to transport oil overland from Kazakhstan petroleum fields to industrial centers in Western China.⁴⁹ The Chinese continue to quietly embed themselves in the region, though their interests, for now, appear limited.

To achieve its national interests in Central Asia, China uses its economic and diplomatic power. Military tensions were markedly reduced through diplomatic means when, in 1996, Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgystan, and Tajikistan signed an agreement in Shanghai, which included the following provisions:

- The withdrawal of all armed forces, excluding border guards, from within 100 kilometers of either side of the borders of the signatories.
- The cessation of military exercises aimed at fighting the signatories of the agreement and the exchange of military observers.
- The increased cooperation and relations between border guards.⁵⁰

Additionally, China has cooperated with Russia and Central Asia in areas of common interests, such as limiting the spread of Islamic extremism, terrorism and the drug trade. Finally, China has increased economic cooperation with the region. After independence, China was initially the largest trading partner, as well as principal funder for numerous joint projects, throughout Central Asia.⁵¹ All of these steps have strengthened its position in Central Asia and have reduced the traditional suspicion between Central Asia and China.

China's involvement in Central Asia, however, is detrimental to U.S. efforts to promote economic and political reform. China has no interest in the economic globalization of the Central Asian republics and any subsequent increase in competition with the West. China also prefers the current authoritarian regimes over the possibility of popularly elected governments

⁴⁹ Sokolsky, *NATO and Caspian*, 35.

⁵⁰ Kasenov in *Security Dilemmas in Russia and Eurasia*, 190.

because it fears the example this may set for their own people. Ultimately, China's long-term goals for Central Asia may include regional dominance. This carries the risk of increasing Russo-Chinese tensions and the formation of hostile blocs within Central Asia.⁵² At present, China's efforts in the region have added to the stability of Central Asia, while posing a counter balance to U.S. and Russian efforts.

Iran. Iran's major interests in Central Asia include increasing economic trade and developing positive relations with the new Republics. It hopes that continued economic and diplomatic engagement with Central Asia will help Iran break out of the international isolationism imposed by the United States.⁵³ Iran's long-term interest of expanding its leadership position within the Islamic world will play a secondary role.

Iran's foreign relations strategy in Central Asia is a "pragmatic, cautious and moderate policy of regional engagement." Relying primarily on economic and diplomatic elements of national power despite its large military, it has achieved limited success.⁵⁴ It has firmly entrenched its influence in Turkmenistan and has completed the first minor natural gas pipeline from that country to Iran in 1997.⁵⁵ Iran also played a prominent role in ending the Tajik civil war when it assisted Russia and negotiated a temporary end to that conflict.⁵⁶ It has aligned itself and has cooperated with Uzbekistan and Russia against the Taliban by providing support to the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan. These positive steps have helped Iran establish close ties in

⁵¹ Olcott, *Central Asia's New States*, 35.

⁵² Sokolsky, *NATO and Caspian*, 39.

⁵³ Sokolsky, *NATO and Caspian*, 47.

⁵⁴ Kasenov in *Security Dilemmas in Russia and Eurasia*, 190.

⁵⁵ Olcott and others, *Getting it Wrong*, 53.

⁵⁶ Sokolsky, *NATO and Caspian*, 44.

Turkmenistan and, to a lesser extent, Tajikistan (mainly ethnic). Iran also continues to foster good relations with Russia.

It is doubtful Iran will continue to make further bilateral inroads in the remaining Central Asian Republics of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan because of its geographical remoteness (it only shares a border with Turkmenistan), lack of economic resources to devote to engagement in these countries, and the traditional mistrust of Iranian intentions. To maintain its influence in Central Asia, Iran will most likely align itself with Russia, as long as Iran is not excluded from its share of the lucrative Caspian oil profits. Finally, Iran like Russia, China, and the United States, wants to contain ethnic regional conflicts in Central Asia, though it will not readily cooperate with Western initiatives unless the political situation between the United States and Iran changes.

Turkey. Turkey's key interests in Central Asia include the increase in regional influence and economic integration. Its interests are driven partially from its disillusionment with the U.S. and European Union and partly from its shared ethnic, cultural, historical, and linguistics background with the Turkic people.⁵⁷ Although Turkey initially sought the unrealistic goal of creating Pan-Turkic solidarity within Central Asia, it now seeks the steady growth of Turkish influence throughout the region.

Turkey's attempt to secure a leadership role in Central Asia from 1992-1996 was characterized by an enormous investment of economic and diplomatic effort. During this period, Russia viewed Turkey as a serious challenge to Russian control of the region and characterized Turkey as "the leading power of the Turkic people seeking ascendancy over the

⁵⁷ Sokolsky, *NATO and Caspian*, 41.

CIS Central Asia States.”⁵⁸ Turkey invested over \$1 billion in Kazakhstan and participated in over 100 joint ventures; it also sponsored 22 joint ventures in Kyrgyzstan.⁵⁹ Additionally Turkey has provided assistance and training to Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan national forces.⁶⁰ A combination of Russian resistance and the lack of money for sustained large scale investment and economic integration resulted in the loss of momentum of Turkish engagement efforts.

Failing to achieve Pan-Turkic solidarity following its initial push, Turkey undertook a more realistic policy in dealing with Central Asia. Turkey’s strategy of engagement in the region continued, but was limited by its economic and diplomatic constraints and the goal shifted to more limited and long-term objectives. Turkey will continue to build friendly bilateral relations with several Central Asian countries, especially Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan, and it will continue to push for the construction of pipelines from Central Asia through Turkey, terminating on the Mediterranean. For this, and to avoid conflict, Turkey will seek to allay a negative Russian reaction to Turkish encroachment in Central Asia.

Turkey’s current efforts in Central Asia are compatible with U.S. policy, and the United States can reasonably depend on Turkey to support U.S. initiatives in the region. However, Turkey’s influence and assistance as an ally in the region will be restricted by its geographical remoteness from the area and its lack of economic means. Turkey also faces traditional suspicions by Russia and Iran, which may increase the possibility of conflict in the middle and long-term and embroil the United States. These reasons place Turkey as a peripheral player in Central Asia.

⁵⁸ Allison in *Russia, The Caucasus, and Central Asia*, 36.

⁵⁹ Sokolsky, *NATO and Caspian*, 41.

⁶⁰ Kasenov in *Security Dilemmas in Russia and Eurasia*, 204.

Russia. “High-ranking Russian civilian and military officials have repeatedly emphasized that Russia’s security can best be protected by establishing a sphere of influence in the former Soviet south and by defending Russia’s special rights, interests, obligations, and responsibilities in the region.”⁶¹ Though this stance is disputed by the more liberal officials in Moscow and by the West in general, Russia’s interests in maintaining the stability of Central Asia include maintaining its positive balance of trade with Central Asia; collecting the sizeable debts owed to it; protecting the expatriate Russian population throughout the region; and providing for the security of Russia against transnational threats, the spread of ethnic conflict and foreign aggression. Russia has therefore sought to dominate Central Asia. In so doing, Russia has employed all elements of national power to include economic, military, political and informational means.

Russia has succeeded in part in dominating the economies of the Central Asian Republics. It has forestalled the construction of major pipelines from the Caspian basin that threaten to bypass Russian control, and it has entered into trade agreements with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan (customs union). Moreover, after 50 years of centralized economic planning, the Central Asian states face bleak economic futures and dependence on Russia.⁶² The economic system under the Soviet Union integrated the Central Asian states as net exporters of raw materials, forcing them to import products from Moscow at higher costs. Kazakhstan, for example, even with its substantial oil reserves, is a net importer of energy resources because its oil transport system is configured to transport oil to Russian refineries. Additionally, Russia is

⁶¹ Sokolsky, *NATO and Caspian*, 25.

⁶² James Chavin, “Independent Central Asia: A Primer,” *Current History*, April 1994, 161. The author’s states that the root cause of the poor economies in the region is that “Central Asian Republics were designated primary agricultural producers with little value-adding processing to go on within their borders.”

owed large sums of money in payment of substantial debts owed by several of the Central Asian states.⁶³

Russia perceives the security of the southern Central Asian states as synonymous to security of the Russian state itself. Consequently, Russia has maintained a sizeable military presence in the region as part of the 201st Motorized Rifle Division and as border guards in Tajikistan.⁶⁴ In the past, Russia has provided security forces and funding to all of the Republics; however many of these security functions were subsumed by the Central Asian states. The Republics of Tajikistan and to a lesser degree, Kyrgyzstan, still rely on Russia for security and support of their small militaries in terms of equipment and training. Turkmenistan has conducted bilateral talks with Russia concerning security, and maintains their own military establishment, though it still requires Russian forces and military assistance in case of invasion by a sizeable foe. Kazakhstan does not retain armed forces of an adequate size and sophistication to defend against possible future Uzbekistani or Chinese hostilities and therefore depends on good relations with Russia and shared security concerns about the region's borders. Only Uzbekistan retained a sizable inventory of military hardware and large training infrastructure and therefore maintains the most viable military force in the region. Outside of Uzbekistan, this overall military reliance on Russia provides the former Soviets inroads in maintaining their sphere of influence.

Russia has gained mixed success in the employment of its political element of national power. The Russian government favors the authoritarian regimes currently in place in Central

⁶³ Russia has shutdown the pipelines from Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan over economic disputes in the past. However, the ability to control the transportation of energy resources from the Caspian is declining with the diversification of energy transportation such as the Iranian-Turkmenistan pipeline and the approved Chinese-Kazakhstan pipeline.

⁶⁴ Olcott, *Central Asia's New*, 57. Maintenance of the current regime in Tajikistan is largely facilitated by the large Russian military presences in the country.

Asia as an alternative to instability on its borders and therefore supports various pro-Russian regimes in Central Asia.⁶⁵ Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev and Kyrgyzstan President Askar Akayev are Central Asia's most ardent supporters of economic and security integration with Russia and vocal proponents of the CIS.⁶⁶ Uzbekistan's authoritarian leader, President Islam Karimov, was a member of the former Soviet Union Politburo under Mikhail Gorbachev, and has continued to promote cooperation within the commonwealth but has avoided further integration with Russia.⁶⁷ Ironically, the less populated states of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan welcome some amount of Russian presence in the region in order to counteract the possibility of Uzbekistan becoming a Central Asian hegemon. Russia has played upon this and other fears, such as the encroachment of China, Iran and Afghanistan, to gain political support in Central Asia.

Although a real concern, Russia uses its claim to protect the Slavic populations within the Central Asian states as a means to legitimize its special role in region and gain privileges not extended to other states. Russia has also overstated the threat of Islamic extremism and terrorism in an attempt to further justify its direct intervention in Central Asia. These claims have had varied success in promoting the recognition of the Russian sphere of influence in the southern tier.

Russia's tight relationship with and interests throughout its former states in Central Asia convey the degree of importance Moscow places on continuing its dominance of the region.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Graham Fuller, "Central Asia: The Quest for Identity," *Current History*, April 1994, 148.

⁶⁶ Islam, 155.

⁶⁷ Roger D. Kangas, "Uzbekistan: Evolving Authoritarianism," *Current History*, April 1994, 181.

⁶⁸ Russia views Central Asia as "vital" to their national interests whereas to the United States, under current strategic development terminology, the area is considered only a third tier interest with the future potential of moving into second tier importance. Russia's will in the area to maintain dominance or a sphere of influence far outweighs the U.S.'s will to interject themselves. This will has been demonstrated by Russia's military and economic commitment in Tajikistan and its continued push in producing military security arrangements throughout the region. Also, Russia is still very economically integrated with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan owning large portions of industries in both

However, Russia is losing control over the Central Asian Republics as energy transportation means are diversified and the economies of the region respond to reform programs and the infusion of capital from outside sources. Also, the creation of independent currencies outside the ruble zone by several of the Central Asian states symbolized a step towards economic independence and a blow against Russia's effort of economic integration. Military control has diminished as the cost of maintaining sizeable troop formations in Central Asia becomes prohibitive in light of Russian domestic economic problems. Also, most Central Asian Republics have taken measures to form their own border and military forces separate from Russian control.⁶⁹ The increasing penetration of the West and other foreign influence has reduced the dependence of the Central Asian Republics on Russia as a conduit to the rest of the world. Politically, Russia has fallen short in its efforts to form collective security and economic unions encompassing the whole region.⁷⁰ The continuing erosion of Russian control and the increasing gap between Russia's ability to support its foreign policy in Central Asia will cause Russia to limit economic and military efforts in the region. However, the traditional old fear of "encirclement" will (still) cause Moscow to act defensively against any attempts by foreign forces to infringe on the sovereignty of the Central Asian states' borders.⁷¹

U.S. Interests and Current Policy in Central Asia

countries. Russia's paranoia over the region is understandable... with China, a 300,000 strong Afghan army, revolutionary Iran and a 1 million man Turkish army bordering Central Asia, security concerns are acute in Russia's southern tier. Compounded with the security reality, Russia's traditional or historic security interests in the region establish a pattern of concern even today.

⁶⁹ Uzbekistan has developed a viable military force and guards its own borders. Kyrgyzstan has taken responsibility for guarding its own borders. Turkmenistan continues to rely on Russian for guarding its borders but has increasingly taken over control of the majority of these forces.

⁷⁰ Ronald M. Bonesteel, Major U.S. Army, "Viability of a CIS Security System," *Military Review*, January-December, 1992, 37.

⁷¹ Fuller, 148.

Tailoring a strategy to meet U.S. national interest in exploiting energy resources and deterring transnational threats given the unique constraints of the region is, at best, complicated. The underlying economic conditions alone make it extremely difficult for the United States to employ its elements of power in the region. This is especially true for implementing military strategy. In the end, the importance of the region may be simply stated in terms of geography: the region is centrally located in between four nuclear powers (Russia, China, Pakistan and India), two regional powers (Iran and Turkey), and one failed state. Graham Fuller contends that the simple “geopolitical centrality of Central Asia – its spokes radiating out in all directions across a vital continent – is of considerable importance.”⁷² This sentiment is echoed by James Chavin who in his article “Independent Central Asia: A Primer,” contends that the region is too large and important, with a long history, for the West to stand by and do nothing.⁷³ Although U.S. interests in the region may not be considered “vital,” ignoring the region would have detrimental effects for the world in the future.

The United States seeks to accomplish its objectives in Central Asia by promoting economic and political reform, while decreasing dependency on Russia. The United States believes its goals of enhancing security, bolstering economic prosperity and promoting democracy are mutually supportive and can be obtained through a national strategy of engagement.⁷⁴ However, U.S. engagement in Central Asia has a separate aim of limiting Russian and Iranian influence in the region. To maintain its influence in the region, the U.S. has employed military, economic and political means (see figure 1). Of these three, the U.S. has relied disproportionately on the military for executing engagement in Central Asia.

⁷² Ibid, 149.

⁷³ Chavin, 160.

⁷⁴ The White House, *A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement*, (Washington DC: GPO, 1996), ii. Cited hereafter as *1996 National Security Strategy*.

INTERESTS:	NATURAL GAS AND OIL REDUCE TRANSNATIONAL THREATS CONTAIN RUSSIA AND IRAN
GOALS:	CREATE STABLE AND INDEPENDENT STATES STRONG OPEN ECONOMIES DEMOCRATIC POLITICAL SYSTEMS
OBJECTIVES:	ECONOMIC REFORM POLITICAL REFORM DECREASE DEPENDENCE ON RUSSIA
ACTION:	<i>MILITARY MEANS</i> (IMET Programs, Foreign military sales, Multi-national exercises, Counter-drug/terrorism training, NATO, OSCE) <i>POLITICAL MEANS</i> (Treaties, alliances, UN participation, diplomatic visits, rhetoric, negotiation/ mediation) <i>ECONOMIC MEANS</i> (Loans, influence in WTO and World Monetary Funds, Loans, USAID Program, Private Investment)

Figure 1 Engagement Strategy

Figure 1 above breaks down the hierarchy of interests, goals, objectives, and available resources in Central Asia. The remainder of this section will discuss the current application of military, economic and political resources in the region as well as define the meaning of the term “engagement.”

Engagement. “Engagement” is the expenditure of national resources and energy in support of national interests throughout the globe. With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the end of the “policy of containment” pertaining to communism, a vacuum was left in U.S. national security strategy. The United States could either to return to some form of the isolationism practiced by the U.S. before WWII or create a new *raison d’etat* for staying

involved militarily, economically and politically with the rest of the world. The U.S. chose engagement as its core national security strategy.

Never has American leadership been more essential – to navigate the shoals of the world’s new dangers and to capitalize in its opportunities. American assets are unique: our military strength, our dynamic economy, our powerful ideals, and above all, our people. We can and must make the difference through our engagement; but our involvement must be carefully tailored to serve our priorities.⁷⁵

Military peacetime engagement was a subset of the National Security Strategy of Engagement and encompasses all non-mid level regional (MRC) military engagements and results in an expenditure of Department of Defense resources.⁷⁶ Military peacetime engagement superimposed a wide range of military means for achieving political objectives. At one end of the spectrum, military engagement sought to overcome security issues caused by socioeconomic and underdevelopment through nation building and education. At the other end of the spectrum, military action can be used to overcome armed military or pre-military conflict through peacemaking and peacekeeping. There are generally more political and economic options than military options for solving security problems at the lower end of the spectrum (see figure 2).

Peacetime Military Engagement. In Central Asia, a large portion of the national strategy of engagement was focused on and coordinated by the Commanders in Chief (CINC) with that geographical region of responsibility. For purposes of this paper all methods used by the CINC to promote the national strategy of engagement will be considered part of military engagement. Aside from the traditional missions of presences and power projection, Central Command, for the last five years, was the focal point of nation building and building diplomatic

⁷⁵ 1996 National Security Strategy, i.

ties in the region. Much of the military effort in the region has been focused on building a viable regional security regime independent of Russian control. Additional military efforts have included counterterrorism, counternarcotics and the prevention of WMD proliferation. The most visible and potentially risky example of U.S. peacetime military engagement in Central Asia are the Partnership for Peace exercises and bilateral and multinational exercises involving U.S. forces and national forces from the Central Asian republics. Current policy has stopped short of committing troops to peacekeeping and peacekeeping efforts and instead supports the United Nations in overseeing these efforts in the region. Overall, military engagement in Central Asia has been partially successful (as in the area of WMD proliferation), but to date it has failed to induce the Central Asian governments to adopt lasting democratic and economic reforms.

⁷⁶ Logistics Management Institute (LMI), *Peacetime Military Engagement: A Framework for Policy Criteria* (Bethesda, Md: LMI, August 1993), 1-1. Cited hereafter as *Peacetime Military Engagement*.

Security problems	Decision-making entities					
	Non-military			Military		
	Bilateral	International	Nongovernment	U.N.	Regional Gov'ts.	Major powers
Socioeconomic under development	Foreign aid and development assistance		Markets		Nation-building	
Economic and natural disasters	Foreign aid and humanitarian assistance			Disaster assistance		
Organized crime	Counterterrorism and counternarcotics operations			Counterterrorism and counternarcotics operations		
Conflicting economic and political claims	Diplomacy, intermediation, and sanctions				Support for diplomacy, intermediation, and sanctions	
Armed military and/or pre-military conflict				Peacemaking		
Post-conflict settlement of claims (e.g., business, political, etc.)				Peacekeeping		

Figure 2. Non-Military vs. Military Engagement

Source: Logistics Management Institute, *Peacetime Military Engagement: A Framework for Policy Criteria* (Bethesda, MD: LMI, August 1993), 2-3.

There have been prior attempts to address the lack of control over engagement strategy in Central Asia by the U.S. State Department. In a 1999 report for the Carnegie Commission Task Force of South Caucasus and Central Asia, Adam Stulberg gives a possible explanation for the lack of State Department coordination of engagement in Central Asia:

The earlier preoccupation with NATO enlargement, arms reduction, and the creation of a special relationship with Russia nearly exhausted the agenda for Eurasia at the senior level. The appointment of a special coordinator for the Caspian Basin based at the State Department marked a concerted attempt to streamline decision making towards the region. However, this position currently lacks the administrative authority and technical staff needed to coordinate interagency foreign and commercial initiatives, or the multiple security

implications of energy issues that intersect in the region.⁷⁷

Despite the military implications of peacetime engagement and the CINC's major role in it, the "foreign policy implications are broader in scope and approach."⁷⁸ Also, the complexity of the Central Asian region to include competing U.S. political objectives requires intense interagency coordination, planning and cooperation, a role that should be undertaken by the State Department, with direction from the White House (NSC).

In the absence of high-level interests and State Department coordination, the Commander in Chief of CENTCOM has been left to carry out almost all aspects of U.S. national security interests in Central Asia. Additionally, as congressional funding for overseas missions increasingly favors the Pentagon's regional commanders-in-chiefs, these generals and admirals find themselves taking on tasks previously handled by civilians.⁷⁹ The CINCs enjoy ample resources and staff structures that are as large as the Executive Office of the President. "More people, about 1,100, work at the smallest CINC headquarters, the U.S. Southern Command, than the total assigned to the Americas at the State, Commerce, Treasury and Agriculture departments, the Pentagon's Joint Staff and the office of the secretary of defense."⁸⁰ With the balance of resources favoring the CINCs, the State Department concentrates on what is perceived as regions vital to American interests (most prominently Egypt and Israel to which a large portion of U.S. foreign aid budget is devoted), leaving Central Asia and other less vital regions to the CINCs to implement a regional engagement strategy.

⁷⁷ Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict, *U.S.-Russian-NIS Cooperation to Prevent Deadly Conflict: A report of a Commission Task Force* (New York: Carnegie Corp., December 1999), 44. Cited hereafter as U.S.—Russian—NIS Cooperation.

⁷⁸ *Peacetime Military Engagement*, 3-11.

⁷⁹ Dana Priest, "An Engagement in 10 Time Zones," *Washington Post*, 29 September 2000, A01.

CHALLENGES TO U.S. ENGAGEMENT

Competition over hydrocarbons resources, fragmented efforts in addressing transnational and ethnic conflict threats, as well as the poor economic conditions prevailing in the region are just some of the obstacles to U.S. Central Asian Engagement Strategy. The obstacles are further reinforced by the divergence of military objectives of preventing Russian or Iranian hegemony and the political and economic ones of opening markets and promoting stability.⁸⁰

International, regional, and ethnic rivalries diminish the effectiveness of efforts to build collective security and economic unions in the region. The nature of the transnational threats, their sources, and the intense ethnic friction that characterizes the region are also difficult to address through the current U.S. engagement strategy. Finally, overcoming the economic and political realities of poverty, corruption, tribalism, and authoritarian rule present a major hurdle to meaningful reform.

Rivalry with Russia

The U.S. has vacillated between being overly sensitive to Russian security concerns in Central Asia and ignoring the obvious considerations borne from Russia's shared historical and geographical kinship in the region. "Blatant disregard for Russian interests in what Moscow considers to be its 'near abroad' risks provoking Russian countermeasures on other fronts in the U.S. – Russian relationship."⁸² Within this category falls Russia's perception of NATO/Partnership for Peace enlargement into the Central Asian region, attempts to break

⁸⁰ Dana Priest, "A Four-Star Foreign Policy?," *Washington Post*, 28 September 2000, A01.

⁸¹ Stephen Blank, "U.S. Military Engagement with Transcaucasia and Central Asia." June 2000, Army War College site under keyword "Central Asia," <http://carlisle-www.army.mil>. URL: < <http://carlisle-www.army.mil/usassi/ssipubs/pubs2000/milengag/milengag.pdf> >, accessed December 04, 2000.

Russia's energy transportation monopoly, as well as certain U.S. rhetoric inflaming Russia's sensitivity over the region.⁸³ Fear of U.S. and NATO encroachment lends credibility and momentum to the hardliner's agenda in Moscow concerning the continued need of Russian dominance in the southern tier.⁸⁴ It may also lead to increased Chinese and Iranian influence in the CIS "inimical to U.S. interests and could compel Russia to integrate the areas by force."⁸⁵

On the other hand, one expert argues that the United States has been overly sensitive to Russian concerns in Central Asia and will not act in opposition to Russian intervention in the region except by "word and symbolic deed," and is unlikely to take on a more direct form of military countermeasures.⁸⁶ This aspect of acquiescing to Russian sensitivities has been characterized and has resulted in the 'Finlandisation' of Central Asia. If the West does not exercise a policy of engagement sufficient to challenge Russian domination of the region, the region likely will consolidate under a Russian sphere of influence or what has been termed the "Monroskiy doctrine."⁸⁷ An overriding concern about Russian sensitivities may erode the effectiveness of U.S. engagement in Central Asia (military or otherwise) due to the need to water-down efforts as a means of assuaging Russian fears.

⁸² U.S.—Russian—NIS Cooperation, 42.

⁸³ U.S.—Russian—NIS Cooperation, 46. For a further explanation of how the Clinton administration has exacerbated Russian anxieties read page 46 of Adam Stuhlsberg's report for the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict.

⁸⁴ Frederick P.A. Hammersen, "The Disquieting Voice of Russian Resentment," *Parameters*, Summer 1998 [URL:<http://carlisle-www.army.mil/usawc/parameters/98summer/hammers.htm>](http://carlisle-www.army.mil/usawc/parameters/98summer/hammers.htm), accessed December 04, 2000. This source offers a great discussion about Russia's perceived aggression of NATO expansion and enlargement to include the Partnership for Peace Program.

⁸⁵ Institute for National Strategic Studies National Defense University, "Essays 1999," *Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Strategic Essay Competition*, National Defense University Press, Washington, D.C., 1999, 55. Cited hereafter as Essays 1999.

⁸⁶ Rajan Menon, "In the Shadow of the Bear," *International Security*, Summer 1995, 179. An example of U.S. unwillingness to commit U.S. troops to the Transcasus was demonstrated in the U.S.'s recent offer to back UN peacekeeping efforts in Georgia – but without U.S. troops – illustrates the limits of U.S. capabilities.

⁸⁷ John W. R. Lepingwell, "The Russian Military and Security Policy in the Near Abroad," *Survival: The IISS Quarterly*, Autumn 1994, 87.

U.S. engagement in Central Asia will not succeed in excluding Russian influence in the region, for the following reasons:

- The high level of economic integration between the NIS and Russia left over from the break up of the Soviet Union.
- Russia's geographical proximity to the region compared to U.S. remoteness.
- Russia's will to continue expending scarce resources in Central Asia outweighs the U.S. lack of will to supplant Russia as the guarantor of Central Asian security.

Therefore, a Central Asian policy of engagement focused primarily on keeping Russia out of the region will not succeed in the long term and will detract from the overall efforts to build stable economic, political, and security arrangements in the region. It may instead push Russia into forming alliances with Iran and China in Central Asia as a counterbalance to Western encroachment or even more direct military action bent on securing its southern tier. The U.S. should seek a partnership based on mutual interests in the region with Russia as an alternative to rivalry.

Complexity of Threats: Transnational, Ethnic, and Interstate Violence.

The complexity of the transnational threats, ethnic conflicts, and interstate tensions also inhibits the effectiveness of U.S. engagement in Central Asia. The majority of these threats are born from the destabilizing effect of the Afghani civil war. The continued fighting, porous borders, cross-border ethnic identity, and state-sponsored support for Islamic extremism and terrorism are all difficult problems to address without attacking the central issue of the civil war itself. Violence caused by the civil war in the region is perpetuated in two ways. First, in an

attempt to combat the expansion of the Taliban, the Russians, Iranians, and the Uzbekistanis continue to support the Northern Alliance fighting the Taliban. As long as this continues, it is unlikely that the Taliban will be able to achieve a decisive result and end the violence. Second, in response to the ethnic unrest, terrorism, and spread of Islamic militancy caused by the civil war, Central Asian regimes in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have applied increasingly authoritarian means to combat unrest in their own populations. This is true to some degree in each of the five Central Asian republics. Bilateral support from the U.S. to individual authoritarian regimes like Uzbekistan will perpetuate this cycle and identify the U.S. with the repressive governments. Additionally, support and aid given to one ethnic majority group will invariably alienate other minority ethnic groups. In Central Asia, government regimes are identified along ethnic and tribal lines; therefore, relations with the region's governments equates to entanglement in the ethnic dynamics of the region.

The threat of widespread Islamic militancy penetrating throughout Central Asia is currently not a serious threat, though the movement is growing. Iran has not sought to spread its brand of Islamic revival across Central Asia and instead has attempted rapprochement as in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Also, the majority of the non-Tajik Muslims practice the less reactive Sunni branch of Islam. Neo-imperialists in the former Soviet Union have used the threat of Islamic extremism as an excuse to continue authoritarian rule by draconian means. Some Western politicians and strategists see the prevention of anti-western "Wahabism" as a vital national interest. The threat, though, is overestimated. Central Asia is neither culturally nor historically predisposed to take on a radical form of Islam. Islam, by virtue of the Soviet era, is infused in everyday life as a culture and not so evasive in its politicized form. There is a threat that the high level of political repression and economic deprivation will provide fertile grounds

for fundamentalists to politicize Islam as they have in the Ferghana Valley, a highly disputed and ethnically diverse region where the borders of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan meet. However, a turn to Islam would be more a response to adverse stimuli than the cause of the instability itself; little different than any indigenous grass roots opposition movement. “A Western policy for Central Asia that has the containment of Islam or Iran as its rationale is certain to be counterproductive: it will generate suspicion, resentment and nationalist backlash.”⁸⁸ Such a policy would ignore the basic problem: “the nexus between economic transition, stability, and security in Central Asia.”

Economic Hurdles

The same economic factors that hindered Russia’s attempt in building collective security structures under the Commonwealth of Independent States are also a significant barrier to U.S. military strategy in the region. “The most important cause for failure of the Commonwealth of Independent States to create a shared security environment...is that all of the post-Soviet states including Russia, are too weak, distracted, and poor to be able to integrate.”⁸⁹ Military engagement must be accompanied by financial support and resource assistance to the militaries of the region in order for a cohesive collective security organization to be successful. Corruption of the indigenous armed forces due to economic deprivation is hard to combat “when a single bribe can equal six months’ salary for a border guard.”⁹⁰ Lasting and meaningful promotion of building professional and democratically oriented militaries will require a sizeable investment of U.S. military and State Department dollars. For example, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan maintain viable air forces in terms of quantity and quality of aircraft. Yet, for 1998, only Kazakhstan

⁸⁸ Rajan Menon and Henri Barkley, “Transformation of Central Asia” 85.

⁸⁹ Olcott and others, *Getting it Wrong*, 94.

reported training flight hours, and these did not exceed 25 hours total for the year. The scarcity of money for training and parts detracts from the capabilities of the region's military.

The Central Asian Republics are divided along economic lines between those states that have access to hydrocarbon resources and those that do not. Both Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan have been blessed with large oil or natural gas reserves, while Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan have minimal energy reserves. This economic division has translated into political alignment and effects aspects of regional security. While Kazakhstan's economy has recovered in recent years, largely due to the exportation of petroleum and Turkmenistan has been able to ensure domestic tranquility due to the distribution of wealth and the increased standard of living for its people, an over reliance on the hydrocarbon industry is risky and could destabilize the region should the flow of oil and gas be disrupted or the global price fluctuate. Furthermore, Uzbekistan, the most populous nation in the region could exert territorial claims in Kazakhstan or Turkmenistan to gain access to what it sees as "Uzbekistan's share" of the Caspian Basin oil.

In this context, U.S. engagement strategy (military and otherwise), should first ensure economic security for the states in the region before devoting resources to build up their indigenous military forces to levels capable of guarding borders and protecting the states from external aggression. U.S. money and resources devoted to Central Asian militaries, while helpful in the short term, will have diminishing affects if the indigenous militaries are not properly sustained by the states themselves. Additionally, the risk of future conflict and unrest in the region can be diminished by assisting these countries in diversifying and reforming their economies.

⁹⁰ Martha B. Olcott, "The Caspian's False Promise," *Foreign Policy*, Summer 1998, 110.

PROPOSED CHANGES

This paper will not offer a single distilled remedy to U.S. engagement in Central Asia. In fact, the current engagement strategy to include military engagement has been effective in some areas such as curtailing the proliferation of WMDs and building friendly ties. One of the problems linked to the concept of engagement is that the effects of engagement are difficult to measure. The following analysis therefore is meant to define the short-falls of our current engagement strategy in Central Asia. These comments are intended therefore to better focus U.S. engagement strategy in Central Asia:

Do Not Focus Engagement on Limiting Russian Influence

This argument is based on the theme that the depth of Russian involvement in Central Asia (culturally, historically, ethnically, economically and security wise) will not be altered by the amount of resources the United States is willing to apply in the region.⁹¹ Rather than competing with Russia in Central Asia and allowing the Republics to play the U.S. off against Moscow, compromise and consensus should be sought. This entails the acceptance of some of the more pragmatic claims of Russia such as their security, ethnic and economic interests in the Southern Tier.

⁹¹ Essays 1999, 55. "In this area, Russia's interest is based not on pique, but on principle, because these states were part of Imperial Russia."

The above suggestion does not mean that the U.S. should acquiesce to all Russian claims in Central Asia, but it does mean that we should seek compromise on most fronts. Instead of only promoting a Turkish pipeline to the Mediterranean from the Caspian, an expansion or maintenance of the current Russian transportation systems should also be examined. Additionally, support of Russian efforts toward collective security in the region should be considered because the U.S. is unwilling to supplant Russia as the principal guarantor of security. A Russian dominated region with U.S. participation is preferable to a Chinese or Iranian hegemony or, worse yet, chaos caused by the expansion and spread of ethnic conflict. This strategy will also give impetus to the more moderate elements in Moscow while diffusing the neo-imperialist arguments of a renewed Russian expansion into the Southern Tier.

Limit the Level of Military Engagement

In order to facilitate this change in the national strategic focus, engagement efforts in Central Asia should be modified to rely less on military means of engagement to a more economic and politically-based policy. Specifically, the Commander in Chief of CENTCOM should limit or discontinue U.S. participation in exercises (PFP and otherwise) in the region, which are perceived by Russia as encroachment by the U.S.. Instead, military efforts in Central Asia should be focused on building collective security that includes Russia as an integral partner in the region. Military engagement activities such as international military education and training, counter-terrorist aid/training, counter-narcotics aid/training, and border guard aid/training should continue and expand according to the level of threat emanating from Central Asia. However, the dominance of military engagement in the past was a function of the CINC filling a vacuum in Central Asian engagement left by the State Department's lack of emphasis in

the region. Without corresponding economic and political efforts vigorously coordinated by the State Department, a decrease in military engagement will result in a strategic gap in U.S. efforts.

Increase Economic and Political Means

A review of the majority of problems plaguing U.S. engagement in the region discloses that a number of the major challenges are economic or political in nature. The development of Caspian Oil transport networks, economic reform, military funding shortfalls, ethnic unrest (based on difference in standards of living) all have their roots in the economy of Central Asia and therefore can best be addressed through economic means. Likewise, political solutions should be examined as the primary means of U.S. conflict resolution in the region and this means should be focused on ending the war in Afghanistan, managing inter-state conflict, and pressuring current regimes towards greater democratic freedoms. Although this is not done without difficulty, a coordinated effort can ensure that both economic and political efforts are tied to ensuring U.S. national interests and policy. Both the World Trade Organization and the World Bank have enjoyed success in facilitating economic reform in Kyrgyzstan by tying aid and loans to real economic reform. Outstripping U.S. government efforts, the effects of Western non-government companies in investment and market development have had tremendous impact on the region yet these remain largely unregulated and unfocused. One possible organizational solution could be the relocation of the institutional hub for administering Central Asian policy from the State Department to the National Security Council. “This would better situate the special coordinator for the Caspian Basin for working closely with other government agencies, thus ensuring greater consistency between numerous U.S. policies toward the region that

intersect with broader strategic and commercial interests.”⁹² A more practical alternative is to have the NSC fashion and clearly articulate national strategy in Central Asia with the State Department responsible for implementing the NSC strategy especially in the field.

Regionalize Security Cooperation

The United States should avoid searching for a strategic anchor in the region and instead continue to address security issues in Central Asia as a regional problem requiring regional solutions. Namely, the U.S. should avoid bilateral security relations such as the current bilateral relations shared by the U.S. and Uzbekistan. Establishing bilateral security relationships will only complicate U.S. engagement strategy for the region as a whole because of ethnic and local security issues inherent in Central Asia. Additionally, identification of the U.S. with authoritarian governments that have track records of human rights abuses could result in the attentions of terrorists, Islamic extremism, and ethnic unrest in the region focused against U.S. interests. It will also send a mixed signal to the rest of the Central Asian Republics about our commitment to democratization.

CONCLUSION: BROAD POLICY VS. ENGAGEMENT

The basic assumption that regional engagement strategy should support broad U.S. policy objectives is valid. However, it is impractical to apply regional engagement in support of policies that undermine such efforts. This is particularly true in Central Asia, and for this reason, the U.S. engagement strategy there should recognize Russia’s national interests. Russia should

⁹² U.S.—Russian—NIS Cooperation, 44.

not be left to impose its own policy unilaterally on the region, but it should be co-opted in order to balance regional competition in Central Asia in favor of the West.

A complete review and analysis of the strategic setting of Central Asia reveals the depth of competition for influence there as well as a sufficiency of varied and complex challenges. Not only is there rivalry between external regional competitors, but there also exists a plentitude of suspicion and friction points between the five republics themselves. Problems in the region range the spectrum of social, political and security concerns. Two problems, however dominate the region and these consist of economic and ethnic issues. Against this is a backdrop of instability and uncertainty provided by the on-going conflicts in Tajikistan and Afghanistan.

The U.S. government has sought to promote its national interests (ensuring Western access to energy and preventing the spread of violence and transnational threats) primarily through the application of military engagement. This engagement strategy, in addition to achieving regional interests, is expected to support the broader U.S. policy of limiting the spread of Russian and Iranian influence. The support of this broader policy pits U.S. engagement efforts against its potentially most viable partner in the region. Rivalry with Russia restricts the effectiveness of U.S. engagement in Central Asia and frustrates collective security efforts. It also exacerbates the difficulties in overcoming the complexity of the security threats as well as economic hurdles. As a result, U.S engagement in Central Asia will continue to have only nominal results and carry the political risk of forming anti-U.S. blocs in the region.

Therefore, the United States should make the following changes to U.S. engagement strategy for Central Asia. First, engagement should not be focused on limiting Russian influence in the region. Instead, the U.S. should seek some level of partnership with Moscow in an attempt to bring stability to Central Asia and resist potential encroachment by China and Iran. This not

only entails a shift in the broader U.S. policy for Central Asia but it also requires a change in the form of engagement from primarily military means to more emphasis on economic and political means.

This leads to the second proposed change to U.S. engagement in Central Asia, which is to limit the level of military engagement in order to reduce points of contention and tension with Russia. Specifically, the U.S. should not conduct multi-national exercises in the region without the participation of Russia. Nor should it seek to promote the expansion of NATO and NATO-related programs in the area without active participation by Russia. Other aspects of military engagement such as IMET programs, military to military contacts, counter-terrorism training/aid, counter-narcotic training/aid, border guard training/aid and foreign military aid should continue. Any efforts towards collective security should include Russia and recognize its role as the primary guarantor of regional security.

Thirdly, both the primary means of engagement as well as the method in which it is directed needs to be addressed. A diminished emphasis on military engagement in Central Asia requires a corresponding increase in political and economic means. Properly directed and applied, these means stand a better chance in addressing two of the major catalysts of instability in the region: the conflicts in Tajikistan and Afghanistan and the developing economies. Also, it is unlikely that the U.S. has the will to deploy troops to the region in a peacekeeping or peacemaking role outside the auspices of the U.N. Therefore, an increase in the political and economic efforts may provide the U.S. greater leverage in addressing conflicts and trans-national threats.

Accompanying a shift in the primary means of engagement, two functional changes should be made. The State Department must expand the role of the special coordinator of the

Caspian Basin to include the entire region, giving him or her a greater administrative authority and a larger technical staff. This will allow a greater focus on coordinating the economic and political elements of engagement. Specifically, the State Department should coordinate “interagency foreign and commercial initiatives and the multiple security implications of energy issues that intersect in the region.”⁹³ At the interagency level, greater effort should be expended in coordinating the decision making process and keeping a consistent policy of engagement in Central Asia. Coordination of both the State Department and the CINCs by the NSC will ensure a more focused effort.

U.S. Engagement strategy in Central Asia has been successful in some aspects. In short, it hasn’t resulted in stability for the region. As regimes such as President Karmonov’s apply greater pressure against his population in order to cope with unrest, terrorist groups such as the Islamic Militancy Union (IMU) are lashing out. According to the January/February issue of The Economist, over 200 Uzbekistani soldiers were killed during 2000 in clashes with Islamic extremist groups. Other states such as Kyrgystan have sought to cope with the increasing threat by tripling its defense budget despite a resource strained economy.⁹⁴ Conflict in Afghanistan and Tajikistan continues and adds impetus to the existing instability. Although the region is not currently on the verge of collapse, the potential of additional Central Asian Republics becoming failed states is likely if trends are not reversed. Such an event would have greater regional and perhaps global effects. Only a proactive focused and tailored U.S. engagement strategy might have a chance in addressing the challenges of instability in Central Asia.

⁹³ U.S.—Russian—NIS Cooperation. 44.

⁹⁴ “Central Asia: Nervous Spring,” *The Economist*, January 27th –February 2nd 2001, 40.

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